

# Finding Legal Assistance



FACT SHEETS ARE A JOINT PROJECT OF IONA AND THE DC DEPARTMENT OF AGING AND COMMUNITY LIVING

A variety of legal services and professionals who specialize in issues relevant to older adults are available. Some is even free or discounted, depending upon your income. Several resources are listed on the back of this flyer.

## COMMON REASONS FOR LEGAL HELP

- Write a will or set up a trust
- Create an advance directive
- Get Medicaid, Disability Income, Social Security, or Veterans Benefits
- Fight an eviction or deal with landlord problems
- Complain about a business

## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE

If you're using free legal help, you may not have a choice in legal staff and some of these questions won't be applicable. But all are important considerations when you look for a lawyer or decide to retain one.

The first person you talk to at a law firm or legal center or clinic will likely be a receptionist or another staff member. You can ask that person general questions such as:

- Where is the lawyer licensed to practice? Can the lawyer legally practice in the location where you or your family member reside, or in the court in which the case will be heard?

- Does the lawyer practice the type of law you need? If so, how long has the attorney practiced that type of law? How many cases similar to yours has the lawyer handled?
- Is there a fee for the initial meeting, and if so, how much is it?
- If you decide to schedule a meeting, ask what information or documents you should bring.

When you first meet with the attorney, ask:

- Does the attorney charge a flat rate, a contingency fee, or an hourly fee?
- What is and is not included in those fees? What additional fees may be charged?
- How long does the attorney anticipate it will take to solve your issue?

Before you decide to hire an attorney, ask yourself:

- Does the attorney seem attuned to my needs?
- Do I feel comfortable sharing potentially intimate information?
- Do I trust the attorney? Do I feel like the attorney generally has my best interest at heart?
- Am I comfortable with the attorney's experience and fees?

Once you decide to hire an attorney, make sure you get a written contract that indicates what the lawyer will do for you, how fees will be determined, when payments are due, and what is and is not included in the fees.

**TURN OVER FOR RESOURCES ►**

## FREE LEGAL HELP

(Generally for people with less than \$24,000, or \$32,000 for a couple)

### ▶ LONG-TERM PLANNING

#### Wills; advance directives, power of attorney

Legal Counsel for the Elderly  
202-434-2170

*Will also assist with guardianship and conservatorship if referred by Protective Arrangements Panel*

Neighborhood Legal Services  
202-832-6577

Catholic University Community Legal Services  
202-319-6788

### ▶ PUBLIC BENEFITS

#### Medicaid, Social Security; Disability

Legal Counsel for the Elderly  
202-434-2170

Neighborhood Legal Services  
202-832-6577

Catholic University Community Legal Services  
202-319-6788

Legal Help Society  
202-628-1161

### ▶ VETERANS BENEFITS

Neighborhood Legal Services  
202-832-6577

Disabled American Veterans  
202-530-9260

### ▶ HOUSING

#### Evictions, poor housing conditions, rent-control issues

Legal Counsel for the Elderly  
202-434-2170

Legal Help Society  
202-628-1161

UDC Law Clinic  
202-274-5073

#### Housing discrimination

UDC Law Clinic  
202-274-5073

Howard University Clinical Law Center  
202-806-8082

#### “Reasonable accommodations” (access for people with disabilities)

Legal Counsel for the Elderly  
202-434-2170

Neighborhood Legal Services  
202-832-6577

### ▶ CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

LCE Self-Help Office

Neighborhood Legal Services  
202-832-6577

American University  
Civil Advocacy Clinic 202-202-274-4147

### ▶ DEBT

Legal Help Society  
202-628-1161

Neighborhood Legal Services  
202-832-6577

### LOW COST LEGAL HELP

If your income is less than \$47,000 (or \$64,000 for a couple) this website can help you find a lawyer who charges a lower rate.

DC Reduced Fee & Mediator Referral Service  
[www.dcrefers.community.lawyer/#](http://www.dcrefers.community.lawyer/#)

## REFERRALS FOR ATTORNEYS WHO CHARGE REGULAR RATES

### ▶ ELDERLAW ATTORNEYS

Advance directives, guardianships and conservatorships, estate planning, wills, trusts, probate, elder abuse, elder fraud, healthcare access, Disability and Social Security claims, and nursing home issues

Visit the National Academy Elderlaw Attorneys website at [www.naela.org](http://www.naela.org)

### ▶ ESTATE LAWYERS

Estate planning, wills, trusts, and life insurance policies

American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys  
[www.aeepa.com](http://www.aeepa.com)

### ▶ SOCIAL SECURITIES OR DISABILITY CLAIMS ATTORNEYS

Disability income applications, disputes with the Social Security Administration

National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives  
[www.nosscr.org](http://www.nosscr.org)

### ▶ FAMILY LAW ATTORNEYS

Child custody, child support adoption, divorce

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers  
[www.aaml.org](http://www.aaml.org)

### ▶ GENERAL LAWYER REFERRALS

Bar Association of DC  
[badc.org/public-services/lrs/](http://badc.org/public-services/lrs/)

*Charges a modest fee.*

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